

CONNECTICUT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT

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TESTIMONY OF JAN VANTASSEL, ESQ.

HOUSING APPROPRIATIONS

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Good evening. My name is Jan VanTassel and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP). CLRP is a statewide non-profit agency that provides free legal services to low income adults with psychiatric disabilities on matters related to their treatment and civil rights.

Approximately 40% of CLRP's advocacy involves protecting the rights persons served by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) to obtain and retain safe, affordable housing, because housing is essential to sustaining the recovery of our clients. And sustaining that recovery is important both to the individuals we serve and to the taxpayers of Connecticut.

I am here tonight to speak in support of the Governor's proposed appropriations for 110 rental assistance certificates to provide supportive housing for DMHAS clients. Supportive housing, which provides permanent housing augmented by support services, has repeatedly been demonstrated to be a cost-effective investment which enables persons in recovery to rebuild their lives in the community and become engaged in productive community activities. That is the reason that it has had bipartisan support from the Legislative and Executive branches of government.

The independent study of Connecticut's original supportive housing pilot programs found that it had positive outcomes by:

- *Reducing the state Medicaid expenditures for hospital inpatient and emergency room use;
- *Increasing the participation of tenants in educational and employment activities, raising their average income;
- *Contributing to higher property values in the neighborhoods where it is located.

Since those initial findings, Connecticut's experience has shown that supportive housing is a cost-effective model for supporting persons being discharged from hospitals. Rather than utilizing a traditional system of requiring an individual to work their way up a ladder to increasing independence, persons discharged directly to supportive housing have been found to maintain their engagement with services, and pursue individual goals. In fact, the Department of Justice directed the State to designate supportive housing as the primary discharge site for hospitalized individuals. This approach both reduces gridlock, and the trauma that can result from repeated changes in the individual's living arrangement that disrupts recovery.

The bottom line is that supportive housing works. We appreciate the Governor's investment in this proven model and urge this committee to support it.